



Education Success for Children in Child Welfare Practice Bulletin



Educational Needs of Children in Child Welfare:¹

Education is critical to every child's well-being and future success, especially for children and young people in the child welfare system.

Foster youth are significantly more challenged in terms of achieving educational success. Their exposure and experiences before and during foster care are stressful and traumatic events: they have experienced abuse and/or neglect; they have been separated from their families; and many have experienced multiple placements and often multiple schools. As a result, many of our foster youth have emotional and behavioral issues, developmental and cognitive limitations, and high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary actions. These in turn contribute to poor academic performance, grade level retention, and high dropout rates. In addition, the number of foster youth with special education needs is disproportionately higher than the general population. Compound all of this with the complexities of navigating the general education and special education systems, not to mention coordinating those systems with the child welfare system, and it is no wonder that child welfare

professionals and advocates are taking more active and engaged roles as education advocates. While this engagement is critical for all children in foster care, it is especially important when the children are (or should be) in special education, and when older youth are preparing to transition to adulthood.

DHS Case reading data indicates that 92% of 359 children reviewed between August 2007 and October 2007 had their educational needs assessed and met.

National Research Indicates²:

- ✓ Children in foster care do not perform as well as other children, lagging in achievement, repeating grades and failing classes.
- ✓ Children in foster care experience frequent changes in placement, often moving from school to school.
- ✓ Children in foster care are twice as likely to drop out of high school as their peers.
- ✓ School records of children in foster care are often lost, misplaced, or inaccessible, hindering timely school enrollment and appropriate school placement and services.
- ✓ Children in foster care often experience gaps in school because of delays in school enrollment.
- ✓ More than half the children in foster care exhibit medical problems, developmental delays and disabilities, including substantial behavioral and emotional problems that can compromise their ability to learn or function in school.
- ✓ Children in foster care often lack consistent advocacy and support from parents or other adults to help them meet the challenges of school.
- ✓ Children in foster care receive special education services at 3 to 5 times the national rate for all children.

Expectation: Concerted efforts must be made to assess children's educational needs at the initial contact with the child/ren and on an ongoing basis, including children under age 2.

Foster children and all children being served in their parental home must be assessed for educational needs. Identified educational needs must be addressed in case

¹ Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin, Education Advocacy, <http://ipl.unm.edu/childlaw/docs/BEST-PRACTICES/0709-EducationAdvocacy.pdf>

Compiled by the Child and Family Services Division, Iowa Department of Human Services

² Addressing the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals. New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren



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planning and case management activities. Examples of educational documentation would include:

- ✓ The case worker's informal assessment and documentation of the child's developmental and educational needs;
- ✓ An educational assessment is included in the comprehensive needs assessment in the case file;
- ✓ An educational assessment was conducted by Early Access, the school, or an Area Education Agency and made available to the department.

Educational records must be shared with foster parents or caregivers and foster parents/caregivers should provide educational records to the caseworker.

For foster care cases, case management activities must assure that:

- ✓ Educational records include the names and addresses of the child's educational providers, the child's grade level performance, and any other relevant education information [Social Security Act §475(1)(C)].
- ✓ To the extent available and accessible, the child's educational records are in the case file and are up to date [Social Security Act §475(1)(C)].
- ✓ The case plan addresses identified educational needs [Social Security Act §475(1)(C)].
- ✓ To the extent available and accessible, foster parents or caregivers of a child placed in a facility are provided with the child's educational records [Social Security Act §475(5)(D)].

Addressing Educational needs for Children in Foster

Care -- concerted efforts must document:

- ✓ Focus on helping children enter school ready to learn;
- ✓ Keep children in out-of-home care from having to change schools;
- ✓ Make school changes, when they do happen, as least disruptive as possible, including additional supports needed to successfully complete transition. Facilitate the transfer of records and credits from one school to another.
- ✓ Provide additional supports to children to help them fully participate in school and ready to learn;
- ✓ Prevent school drop-outs, truancy, and disciplinary action;
- ✓ Involve children and parents in all aspects of the education and education planning; empower them to be self-advocates for educational needs;
- ✓ For older youth, provide supports to plan and facilitate participation in post-secondary education and training.

Core Concepts of Development³:

- ✓ The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood.
- ✓ The interactive influence of genes and experience literally shape the architecture of the developing brain, and the active ingredient is the "serve and return" nature of children's engagement in relationships with their parents and other caregivers in their family or community.
- ✓ Both brain architecture and developing abilities are built "from the bottom up," with simple circuits and skills providing the scaffolding for more advanced circuits and skills over time.
- ✓ Toxic stress in early childhood is associated with persistent effects on the nervous system and stress hormone systems that can damage developing brain architecture and lead to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.
- ✓ Creating the right conditions for early childhood is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age.

Practice Tips:

- ✓ Right up front, get releases of information signed by parents, and document contact with the child's teacher as part of initial and ongoing assessment.
- ✓ Clarify roles and communicate responsibilities between social workers, foster care providers, and parents when meeting the educational needs of children. Make it a clear expectation that if the foster parents follow-up with education issues, that they forward any documentation to you to file. Always share educational information with the foster parents and parents and document that you have done so.
- ✓ Use the **Improving Education Advocacy Checklist**:⁴
 - ☐ Did the child/ren receive a developmental and educational assessment and are educational or developmental needs being assessed and documented on an ongoing basis?
 - ☐ Has an educational decision-maker been designated?
 - ☐ If school age, did the caseworker contact the teacher? If pre-school age, was the child enrolled in a high quality early childhood program [e.g. Early Access for 0-3 year olds]?
 - ☐ Is the child eligible for an individualized educational program [IEP]? Is the child participating? Are the parents, foster parents, and case worker participating?
 - ☐ Are the child's educational goals being met?

³ The Science of Early Childhood Development, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. www.developingchild.net
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⁴ New Mexico Well-Being Practice Bulletin



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- ❑ Are other educational supports [tutoring, after-school programs, speech therapy, etc.] being provided to the child, if needed?
- ❑ Are the child educational records current and in the case record including IEPs?
- ✓ Set the expectation for family team meeting facilitators to invite the teacher or other involved school staff to a family team meeting and identify and address school needs during the family team meeting. Incorporate any planned strategies in the case plan.
- ✓ To assess developmental needs of children, use the ISU Extension Services "Ages and Stages" developmental checklist to screen for developmental issues. Refer children to Early Access.
 - ✚ Children 0-6
<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListItems.aspx?CategoryID=7>
 - ✚ Children 5-11:
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1530I.pdf>
- ✓ Teachers have invaluable information about kids. Ask teachers when it is best to call; sometimes very early or during one of their work hours is best. Stop by after school and ask to talk to the teacher. Ask the teacher;
 - ✚ Does the child receive special services at school?
 - ✚ How much one-on-one does the child require each day? Do you think the school has resources to meet the child's needs?
 - ✚ How often does the student miss school?
 - ✚ Does the child have behavior problems? Is the child succeeding in school academically? Are they reading at grade level?
 - ✚ Is the child succeeding in school socially?
 - ✚ Are there educational supports needed for this child outside of school?
 - ✚ What are the child's strengths?
 - ✚ Have you noticed any recent changes in the child's mood, attitude, or level of social interaction?
 - ✚ Does the child belong to any organized activities such as scouts, band, clubs, sports?
 - ✚ Do you know the child's parents/caregivers? How frequently do you see or talk with the parent/caregiver?
 - ✚ [For middle school youth or older] What skills does the youth have that will contribute to successful employment? Are there any barriers that you think will interfere with the youth's successful employment?

- ✚ What services do you recommend for this child or family that they are not currently receiving?
- ✓ Ask foster care review boards to invite teachers to participate in reviews through written report or in person. Include the foster care review board summary, documents, and recommendations in the case plan.
- ✓ Maintaining foster children in their schools:
 - Case management education advocacy and support services should be facilitated to support or maintain the school placement.
 - Careful consideration should be given to the location of foster care placements to assure the child remains in their school placement.
 - DHS, with the parent's agreement or under court order may seek open enrollment for a foster child.
 - Make sure that children get enrolled as soon as possible and if there is a change of schools, that their credits and record are transferred.

Education of Foster Children in Iowa:⁵

The DHS, Department of Education, Iowa Attorney Generals Office, and IFAPPA has developed an excellent resource for case workers and supervisors which provides legal references and answers to frequently asked questions. A copy and update is available to you:

www.dhs.state.ia.us

DHS & DOE Legal References: DHS code: 217.30, 237.9, 256.46, 281.1, 281-18.3, DOE code: 281-33.2(256), 281-41.30 (256B, 34CFR300) 41.30(1) b., e., 281-41.45(256B, 34CFR300) 41.45(1-3), 281-41.519(256B, 34CFR300) 41.519(1) a.-d.

DHS IAC: 441-202

Resources and Technical Assistance

1. Education of Foster Children in Iowa, February 2008
2. Blueprint for Change: Education Success for children in Foster Care, Legal Center for Foster Care & Education.
3. The Science of Early Childhood Development: Closing the Gap Between What We Know and What We Do; National Scientific council, Center on the Developing child at Harvard University, www.developingchild.net
4. Addressing the Educational Needs of Children in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals. New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. www.nycourts.gov/ip/justiceforchildren
5. Child Protection Best Practices Bulletin, Education Advocacy, New Mexico. <http://ipl.unm.edu/childlaw/publications.htm>
6. Dicker, S., Gordon, E. January 2004. *Ensuring the Healthy Development of Infants in Foster Care: A Guide for Judges, Advocates and Child Welfare Professionals*. <http://www.courts.state.ny.us/ip/justiceforchildren/PDF/Infant%20Booklet.pdf>

⁵ Education of Foster Children in Iowa, February 2008